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MRS. KENNEDY AT THEATER LAST NIGHT . . .

LBJ Gallantry To Jackie Cited

By ROBERT E. THOMPSON

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WASHINGTON, Dec. 20—Persons close to President Johnson said today it would be an unfortunate distortion of fact if Johnson were portrayed in the hotly contested William Manchester book as having acted boorishly toward the Kennedy family in November, 1963.

One source, who was on the presidential jet that carried Johnson and the body of the late President John F. Kennedy back to Washington from Dallas on Nov. 22, conceded that there was tenseness between the Johnson and Kennedy forces on that emotion-laden flight.

But he said Johnson made every effort to treat Mrs. Jacqueline Kennedy and the late President's staff with consideration while pursuing his constitutional responsibility to preserve the continuity of government. The source said everyone aboard the plane was in a fog, deeply disturbed by the assassination and uncertain of its ramifications.

Jack J. Valenti, former assistant to Johnson and now president of the Motion Picture Association of America, said in a separate interview he never saw any friction or hostility aboard Air Force One.

Although he said he has not

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read Manchester's book, "The Death of a President" Valenti maintained that Johnson was, at all times, compassionate toward Mrs. Kennedy.

"The enormity of his responsibility was on him," said Valenti. "His whole demeanor was one of sombre calm. He was thoughtful, kind and gracious to Mrs. Kennedy. All the time, he was conscious of her grief."

These two accounts of Johnson conduct are further substantiated in the current issue of Newsweek by White House correspondent Charles Roberts, one of two newsmen who made the sad flight to Washington on the presidential plane.

LBJ 'SOLICITOUS'

Roberts, who has covered the White House since the beginning of the Eisenhower administration, is quoted as stating that he saw no show of insensitivity on Johnson's part. Newsweek added: "Indeed, to Roberts and others, the new President's behavior seemed a model of restraint and solicitousness."

Johnson and the White

House have attempted to avoid any public involvement in the court fight between Manchester and the Kennedys.

But the President is understood to be concerned lest the facts about what happened on Air Force One and in the day immediately following the assassination be presented in a false light by Manchester.

There have been reports that the Manchester book implies a dispute between Johnson and Robert Kennedy over the new President's decision to address Congress and the nation just four days after the assassination.

Valenti, who became an assistant to Johnson on that fateful day remained in the White House until last summer, said he is not aware of any such disagreement.

"The President was determined and all the advisers around him decided that he must go before the people of the country—and of the world—as soon as possible to reassure them," said Valenti.

One source, who was interviewed by Manchester during his period of research on the book, said the author, a staunch admirer of the late President, had identified himself emotionally as pro-Kennedy and anti-Johnson.

In addition, the individual added, Manchester interviewed Mrs. Kennedy early in 1964 while she remained in a highly emotional state, still suffering greatly from the tragedy of Dallas.

It is understandable, the source said, that the former First Lady may have made comments in that extremely difficult hour which she now would prefer to withhold from publication.

The consensus among persons who watched the transition at first hand is that Johnson has never had a finer hour than in that trying period when he grasped the reins of government, moved forward with the Kennedy legislative program and demonstrated utmost understanding toward the late President's widow.

One source said it would be terribly unfortunate if the events of those days, steeped as they were in great sorrow, were to be distorted in a book.